

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
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AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

VOL. VI

FEBRUARY MCMXXVIII

NUMBER 5

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

THE BEST NEW PLAYS

By Ivor Brown

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THE December plays were undistinguished, but in this they only conformed to the melancholy precedent of the year. If the English theatre is to be judged by the West End of London, then 1927 is a year to be hastily forgotten. Fortunately there is a growing number of people who do not accept that absurd test of dramatic health. For those who do not confuse the art of the theatre with the capital's industry of entertainment there will remain some pleasant memories gathered at various distances from Shaftesbury Avenue. The little theatres plod on and keep the passion fresh, and the Festival performances of the amateurs were full of variety and ambition.

So childish, indeed, did the West End drama become during the year that almost the whole of the central playhouse area could be dismissed as a Crookery Nook. December brought a fresh supply of criminals. "Whispering Wires" and "The Black Spider" were ghoulish neighbours at the Apollo and the Lyric; of these I saw only the former, whose power to mystify was less than is to be expected from a New York success. A new farce at the Ambassadors, "March Hares" by Mr. H. W. Gribble, was extremely well spoken of, as Baedeker says of hotels. Mr. Nicholas Hannen, functioning as producer for the first time, used a clever company so cleverly that the author came in for higher praise than

his piece deserved. For my part, I was bored by the matter and charmed by the method. The company could make even pyjama-drama tolerable. Miss Alison Leggatt, an actress who has definitely arrived this year, added to her past success in "The Fanatics."

Light entertainments included a mannerly musical comedy. In "Sylvia" (at the Vaudeville) Mr. James Dyrenforth adapted Mr. Ervine's "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary," successfully retaining the satire on the theatre, and introducing some gentle airs and lyrics and Miss Margaret Yarde as a Girl Guide. The result was a pleasant show in admirable contrast with the noisy musical pieces of the current vogue. In "Clowns in Clover" (at the Adelphi) the writing of Mr. Ronald Jeans, the omniscient comedy of Miss Cicely Courtneidge, and the brilliant supervision of Mr. Jack Hulbert worked together for cheerfulness. This was an admirable scene and, while we may deplore the lack of serious theatre in 1927, we must admit that the art of intelligent trifling is being extremely well looked after. But not by the Brothers Sitwell, whose attempts to be funny in "All at Sea" (Arts Theatre Club) were lugubrious in the extreme.

A Shaw season at the Little Theatre was a lonely concession to the mind at Christmas. Otherwise, the routine went on and "The Private Secretary" waved his familiar goloshes at the "Bluebell in

THE BEST NEW PLAYS

Fairyland" and "The Windmill Man." Christmas play-going remains a die-hard education. Mr. Russell Thorndike tried a piratical affair called "Dr. Syn" at the Strand, and Mr. Cyril Wood produced quite a jolly novelty at the Arts Theatre Club. This piece, "Tod the Tailor," by Mr. W. Griffin, could easily be built up into an attractive children's play. As the Christmas market goes at present, it has a chance of being popular in 1950, by which time there may be signs of the Rainbow ending and

of Peter Pan growing up. This year Peter certainly grew more elvish, as Miss Jean Forbes Robertson brought to the part exactly that spiritual strangeness which the musical comedy Peters have usually failed to establish. Her Pan was indeed a dark and ghastly creature, who needed no cutlass to deal with Hook; he could have slain by magic, so little of earth was he and so much of air and fire. Let us call it a vintage year for the Pan-fanciers, but not, in London, for the intelligent playgoer.

THOMAS HARDY AND THE THEATRE

HARDY at times felt the lure, as (avowedly or no) most creative men of letters have done; but he did not let it draw him far. He looked at the theatre with the wise innocence of a child. In his old age he wrote—or rewrote—"The Queen of Cornwall" for the Dorchester Players. It was as if he had said: "Write a play? Now, let me see, who wrote good plays? Æschylus, Shakespeare! Well, cathedral or village church, the principle, the essentials are the same." That the result was great drama, he would not for a minute have thought. But it reaches truth by simplicity; and, as simply acted—there is the hard task, though—it has its place. It is a village church. But architects, we are told, judging their craft, turn from the pretentious thing, even from the great thing sometimes, to admire above all else honesty in building and simple taste, be it in a barn.

He made his own "Tess" into a play. Many clever playwrights must have thought how much more cleverly they could have done it. They could, no doubt, have done better—by all the book's inessential things. But what was this petty ineptitude or the other besides the slow sure upbuilding

before us of the true tragic figure of Tess? In art the gulf between the true and the false is always a very deep, but sometimes a very narrow one. A single false stroke could have turned Tess into commonplace melodrama. Hardy might miss a hundred flashy opportunities, but he could not do the wrong thing by Tess herself. And whether he knew it or not (there are things the unconscious artist knows and never remarks even to the conscious artist beside him) he stood for a moment with Æschylus and Shakespeare when he brought Tess from the murdering of Alec d'Urberville to put on her hat and gloves and say simply "Now I can go to Angel." That is great drama, and the theatre fades before it.

"The Dynasts" is drama, but too deliberately detached from the theatre for the theatre to do more than snatch scenes from it than can somehow be made effective. Hardy, choosing dramatic form, yet turned even further from the theatre than did Ibsen to write "Brand" and "Peer Gynt." Ibsen's turning, with those years of stage apprenticeship accounted for, was unavailing; he came round in a circle. "Peer Gynt," at least, is unfailingly effective upon any sort of stage.

THOMAS HARDY AND THE THEATRE

Whether the English theatre should now blush a little to remember that an English man of letters contemplating drama on however heroic a scale, should yet never dream of connecting his art with its craft is a question to be put. For here was another—and the last—of the great Victorians that had the stuff of drama in them: Dickens, Browning, Meredith, and—if more doubtfully—Hardy. And the theatre had not character

enough to attract and hold them and mould their genius to its use. Later, it made some lame amends here, and it has less excusable shortcomings to blush for. "The Dynasts" is high in aim, vast in scope, powerful in achievement. It is not, in truth, very compassable. But this at least its study may teach the theatre's craftsmen to say: If we are to have such poets at work with us, we must aim, in our kind, as high.

DRAMA AND THE ACADEMIC WORLD

By Eric J. Patterson

ENGLAND appears still to the foreigner as the country of complete surprises and the land of the unexpected. "She is so very difficult to understand" he will say "because at the time when Englishmen are the most critical of themselves they generally have the greatest reason for satisfaction, whilst when they recline in easy satisfaction they ought to exercise the critical capacity."

In the great world of the theatre and the drama the foreigner sees the problem no less complicated than in the general field. He reads the dramatic criticism of the newspaper and he gets the impression that the theatre in this country is dead. He learns that the general public have no taste and that the people care so little for the great dramatists that they will not erect a national theatre in their honour. Yet when he goes further into the matter he finds an amazing contrast. He discovers that within recent times there has never been such an intense interest in the theory, practice and politics of the theatre. The whole history of the British Drama League, for instance, is but a further reminder to him of the strange complexity of the British race.

For its extraordinary growth and the ever increasing number of its affiliated societies show that it has not only stimulated a demand, but has also helped to satisfy an urgent need.

Then, too, if the foreigner turns to the Universities he will see the establishment of Schools of Drama, schools which desire to make live the play by presentation and the clear enunciation of speech, not to kill it by dull and dry as dust academic interpretation. He will discover, too, if he casts his eye abroad the spirit of endeavour in the field of new plays, and the spirit of a treasure hunt in the search for forgotten or neglected masterpieces. In the end he will probably say that the English have their own peculiar way of doing things and that Britain is not the dull material country which he had previously thought it.

Yet it will be well for the Englishman not to let pride cloud the necessity for the stocktaking of gains and losses in the world of the theatre nor self satisfaction slow down the movement to greater perfection, for the very success of endeavour brings with it attending dangers.

The great activity in the direction

DRAMA AND THE ACADEMIC WORLD

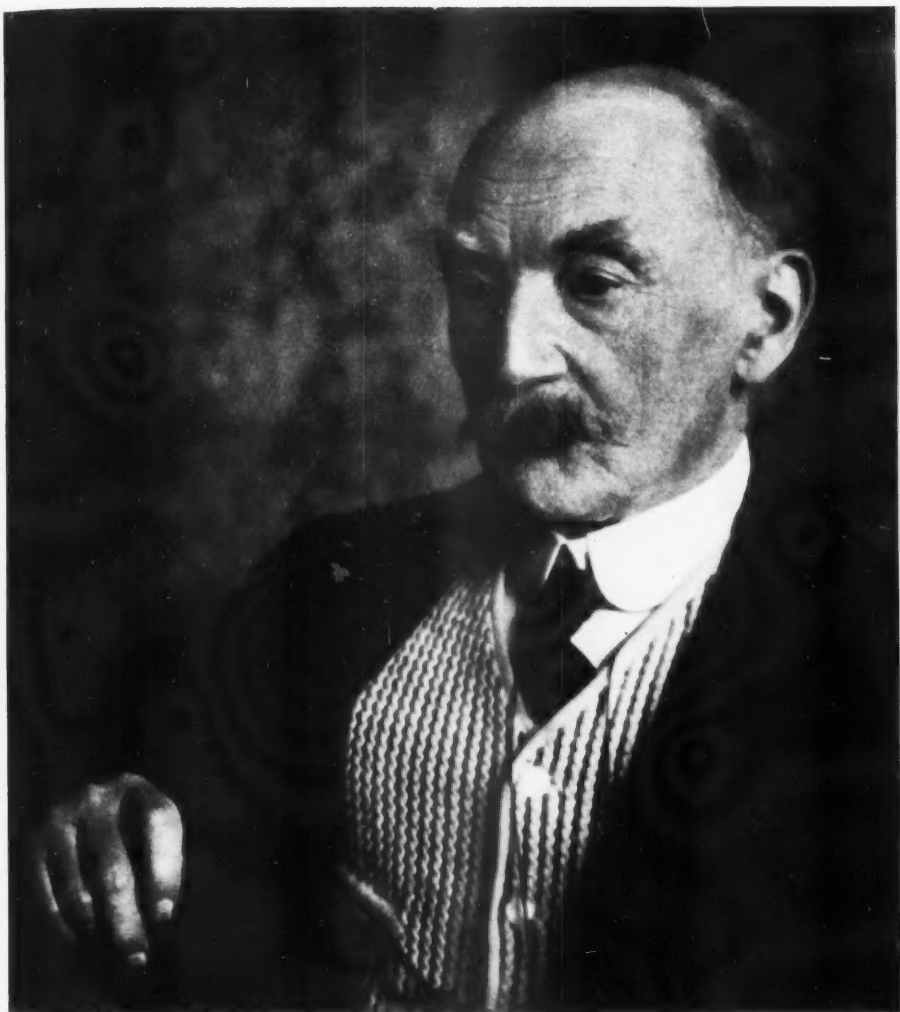
of amateur dramatic effort has no doubt been to the good. It has saved the play possibly from mere financial exploitation, it has enabled people to witness drama which might not have been possible under other conditions; it has given expression to emotions which without it might have had to remain silent. On the other hand much of it has been far from perfect and there has often been an inadequacy of treatment which in some cases has been due to continued absence of essential criticism and in other cases to an ignorance; the result of the want of a standard of comparison. True such festivals as have been organized by the British Drama League have performed a very useful function in this respect for they have not only helped to establish a standard, they have also introduced a healthy spirit of competition and by introducing the critical mind arrived at by contrasts and external judgment have saved many a body of amateurs from that greatest of all dangers, a too easily won applause. Yet when all is said and done there remains the question whether all this new effort is not too divorced from the legitimate stage and whether some effort should not be made to bring about some approximation between the two. Especially should this question be asked in connexion with the Schools of Drama established or about to be established in connexion with our Universities.

Now everyone knows that a number of very foolish things have been said about "highbrows" for after all it is the duty of the Universities of this country to educate, to raise standards and to call into being appreciation of values. It has to be admitted, too, that what may have been called highbrowism has in many cases saved the nation from general imbecility. Yet there is, too, the danger from the academic mind which kills by its methods of criticism and presentation.

(One has only to notice a few of the dramatic commentaries turned out by the narrow academically minded to realize the truth of this statement). The fact is that in the world of the Drama the Universities can and do make a useful but limited contribution; that they can succeed up to a point, but that beyond that point they can only go forward if they have the co-operation of the professional stage. For after all there are many things about the theatre which cannot be taught in the classroom, and can only be learnt in the daily turmoil of the theatre. In a word what is really necessary is some of that joint effort through differentiation of function which exists between teaching bodies and the stage in some foreign countries, and in this respect it should be emphasized that the mere blessing of these new academic ventures by distinguished actors is not enough, nor is it sufficient to have them to give occasional lectures. The essential factor is that the experience of the professional actor should be drawn upon in these matters where he can function more usefully than the academic. How this necessary collaboration is to be attained is, of course, difficult to say, but if these promising ventures are to succeed it is vital that the whole position should be explored and that those who have the power should see the problem and seek the means to its solution.

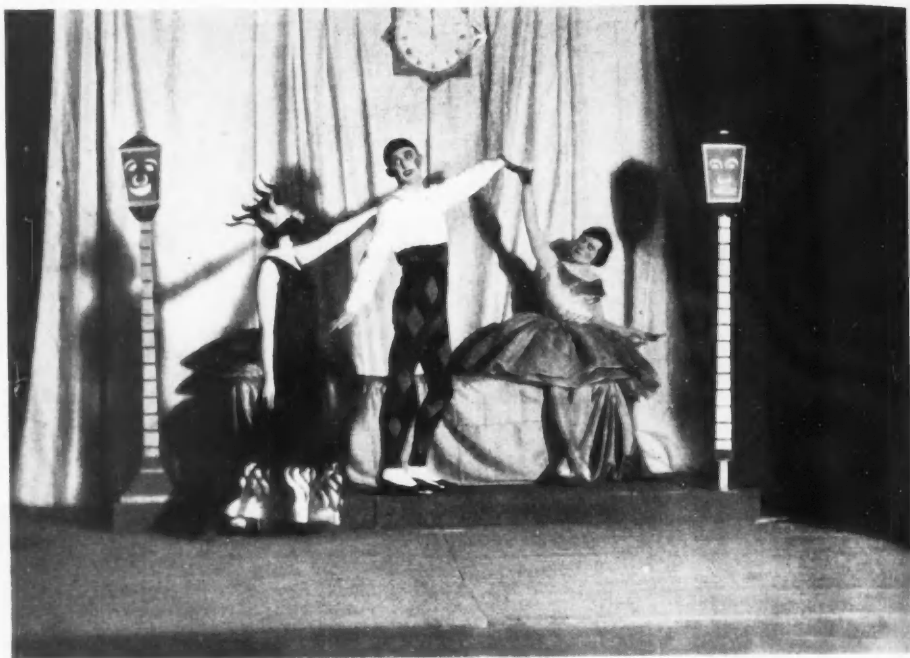
THE CENTURY THEATRE LONDON

We draw the attention of readers to the fact that the Century Theatre, Miss Lena Ashwell's admirable little playhouse in Westbourne Grove, will be available while the Lena Ashwell Players are on their summer tour, for hire by amateur societies and others; a specially low rate is being charged in order to encourage unknown authors to try out new plays at a small cost, and they will there find every facility for dramatic production.



THOMAS HARDY

Camera Portrait E. O. Hoppé



SCENE FROM "A MERRY DEATH" AS PRODUCED BY THE LIVERPOOL PLAYGOERS' CLUB

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VERSE-SPEAKING AND MOVEMENT IN THE MODERN THEATRE

By Terence Gray

THERE is something desperate about setting out to produce one of the masterpieces of dramatic art of the human race. It is not even like setting out to fly the Atlantic, for in that case with luck, courage, endurance and good material, complete success may result from the enterprise. In the case of such a play as the *Oedipus* success can only be relative, but, as compensation, complete failure is impossible.

The limitations imposed upon a repertory company violently narrow a producer's chances of relative success, but even could he choose his company from the entire range of contemporary actors and actresses—I speak only of those concerned with the English language—still would he be hopelessly handicapped, primarily for two reasons.

Drama and the English Theatres

In the first place there is no theatre in England fit for the production of anything but drawing-room comedy and kindred forms of entertainment which demand merely a brightly illuminated platform on which is constructed a flimsy representation of a modern interior. No English theatre has the necessary architectural form, let alone the mechanical appliances necessary for the performance of any kind of serious drama save a purely elocutionary treatment of a purely literary play. The Festival Theatre in Cambridge is at present one of the few theatres in England where serious drama can be treated with any approximation to adequacy, but the limitations of this little playhouse, due to no fault of design, but to financial handicaps in the initial expenditure of construction, render it a

barely practicable instrument for practising the real Art of the Theatre.

Actors and Verse-speaking

In the second place a producer is handicapped by the fact that while the English theatre is, architecturally, only adequate for the purely elocutionary treatment of a serious play, even could he choose his actors from the entire range of his contemporaries he could not get together to-day a company that was competent in elocution itself to do justice to his play. In a repertory company his handicap is increased tenfold for he is dependent upon young actors who are still in process of training and his available time for rehearsal is cut down to one-third of what the play should normally be given. This is not to say that the modern English actor is inferior to his predecessors. One must believe that never before has so much potential ability found its way into the profession. The social range from which actors are drawn has long since widened to embrace the full limits of the social scale, and the finest education the country can provide lies behind the majority of actors in the repertory theatre. Moreover since the Festival Theatre can provide one of the few stages adequate for the presentation of serious drama to be found in England, so, almost automatically, does it draw to itself many of the best, most talented and ambitious elements in the younger members of the profession. But the fact remains, the art of speech, in this case *Verse-speaking*, and the art of *Movement*, remain accomplishments barely comprehended, let alone attempted, by the present generation of actors.

VERSE-SPEAKING AND MOVEMENT IN THE THEATRE

In itself and to those habitually concerned with the theatre this statement is a commonplace, but the play in question inevitably brings it into prominence. There is, however, one aspect of the matter which has not, within my knowledge, been sufficiently realized, and that is that the modern actor does not ever comprehend the necessity of technique in the speaking of verse.

There is in existence to-day an amazing spirit which openly despises technique of any kind. It manifests itself among young ladies of from 15 to 25 who wish to devote themselves to serious artistic dancing and who, ostensibly seeking advice, proudly inform one that technique is an unthinkable trammel on their genius and that their inspiration must be allowed to express itself spontaneously in movement. Their instinct is not faulty in itself. In a state of inspired exaltation some few movements might well be achieved which no amount of technical training could place it within their powers to attain; so in acting, untrammelled inspiration might at odd moments give an intensity of expression which technique alone could not achieve; moreover this attitude has the justification that it may be the backwash of a reaction from a state of affairs in which a stale and uninspired technique, both in acting and in dancing, had sapped all the vitality and killed the living spirit of creative activity in both arts.

But the notion that inherent talent, sensibility, intelligence, inspiration, can replace technique in the general speaking of a verse play is a lamentable error, patent to the most casual of intelligent playgoers, and to a producer or author a chimerical nightmare of horror, a veritable Beast with Seven Heads, a bitter pill which vitiates his palate for anything approaching a correct and sensitive interpretation of the play as a whole. Now, however, the justification that technique is an unnecessary burden that kills creative effort must not be allowed to exist for another day; that reaction has done its work, the old ramparts are down, and both actors and dancers must

return to an intensive study of the techniques of their arts, techniques which are the result of the cumulative experience of countless generations of artists.

Hurried Production and Little Training

As yet the repertory theatres cannot give them this training, this dual training in *Verse-Speaking* and in *Movement*, for existing conditions force repertory theatres to fight for their lives like drowning men. Repertory theatres are forced to produce three times the number of plays which could be produced with anything approaching efficiency in the time at the producer's disposal, with barely half the number of actors necessary for the work. Consequently time for training, time for even one hour's practical lecturing a week, has to be taken at the expense of some vital aspect of the impending production. Moreover an isolated repertory theatre in a provincial town would probably have to depend upon such local instructors as might be available, for it could not afford to retain for itself the services of specialists who could be obtained by the hour in the metropolis.

In time this will surely be remedied. If the Festival Theatre continues to command the support it has had hitherto, if it is allowed to extend its activities elsewhere and take under its wing kindred enterprises under one central organization, there will be established in course of time a centre of training for the Art of the Theatre as a whole, in which every aspect of theatre-craft shall be studied scientifically, in which by means of interchange of companies adequate time will be available for efficient production and for technical training, and in which experts in all branches will be at the disposal of all young artists. In the meantime it lies with the young artists themselves to readjust their attitude, to realize their need of technical training in Elocution and in Movement, and to accept such opportunities of training as present conditions in the repertory theatres permit the directors to place at their disposal, not with scorn and indignation but rather with humility and enthusiasm.

A LETTER FROM BUDAPEST

HE season is in full swing, one first night following the other—not with sold-out houses in each case; but this only incites the management to offer ever-new attractions. German and Austrian authors are almost entirely neglected, Molnar, Lengyel and other Hungarian playwrights being preferred by the public. Apart from these, authors like Verneuil and Maugham are the favourites, and the English musical comedy "Mary," by Youman Irving Caesar, has been very well received too. Frantisek Langer's play, "Peripherie," has been brought out by the Hungarian Theatre; with Ilona Titkoz and Julius Csontos in the principal parts, and was received with great enthusiasm. On the same stage, Fodor's play, "The Church-mouse," was acted. The author, whose name is less known than other Hungarian playwrights, will certainly see his comedy find its way to other continental stages. A number of Somerset Maugham's plays have been acted at this same Hungarian Theatre. One of them, "A Level" (The Letter) has met with quite a sensational success, still appearing on the bill several times a week. This play was staged after the Viennese model; nothing very new nor original was effected, but the performance as a whole was on a level much higher than that usually obtained on this most prominent of the Hungarian stages.

The Hungarian Theatre is now preparing a further play by Maugham, and also one of Galsworthy's. The latter author, so immensely popular in Vienna, has until now been very rarely played in Budapest, although Hungary is usually prone to look to Vienna for a lead in matters theatrical and artistic. Most of his plays, however, are unknown to the Hungarian public. "Mary," the musical comedy, by Youman Irving Caesar, will shortly be given for the fiftieth time. This is a very remarkable thing, for the Royal Theatre, where "Mary" has been brilliantly staged, has for many years been only accessible to

Hungarian composers like Kalman, Lehar and Zerkowitz.

The outstanding event of the season has certainly been the performance of "Kossuth," a patriotic play by Hegedüs, which was given in the middle of November, on the occasion of the unveiling of the Kossuth monuments. A very short time ago Hegedüs was acting as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Hungary, and his play has turned out to be a kind of official document; very long, most circumstantial and very, very tedious in parts, just as such documents usually are. Still, it has not been an absolute failure, though one certainly could not call it a success. At all events, it was an unpleasant surprise for the Hungarians living in America, who had counted on having this same play acted in New York on the occasion of the unveiling of a Kossuth monument there.

America is very much the fashion here in Hungary. Molnar has just left for New York, to superintend there the staging of several of his plays, to return in the spring, when his new comedy will appear. The title of this play is not as yet known—only that it treats a specifically Hungarian theme. Of the first nights in preparation, the most interesting will be Melchior Lengyel's "The Post Office Girl." The rehearsals have already begun, and it is rumoured that this comedy will certainly make its way to the United States, as other plays by Lengyel have done before it.

Hungary's most famous actress, Sari Fedak, is acting just now in Verneuil's comedy, "Mademoiselle Flute." This short play, after a run of fifty performances, has lost nothing of its charm. The part of a star actress growing old but insisting on remaining young is acted with conviction by Fedak. A few months ago the question of this long-famous actress's real age was being eagerly discussed by the public, and the most foolhardy estimates were risked. If the fact transpired that Sari Fedak wants to be younger than she is—

A LETTER FROM BUDAPEST

well, she is but a woman after all—and the judge who officially settled the question has not been well treated by public opinion. At all events, the Varoshely Theatre makes good business out of it all. Fedak's last

conflict with the now Americanized film-performer, Vilma Banky, has not been forgotten—a quarrel which only conferred an increased notoriety on two artists not at all in need of the same.

THE NIGGER MINSTREL

By Frederick Grove-Palmer

VERY few of the present generation have ever seen a real Nigger Minstrel show; they have, of course, been entertained by all kinds of Follies, highly diverting in the majority of cases, but lacking that peculiar quality of charm and appeal that made the niggers so popular with those whose memories carry them back to the Moore and Burgess or the Christy Minstrels. One tries to recall the number of times during recent years, say the last fifteen, that the niggers have gladdened the heart. There was a notable case when about a dozen light-hearted amateurs did such a show in a country theatre in Japan to a bewildered but delighted native audience; it was a wonderful night. Then the other occasion was at the Alexandra Palace on a Bank Holiday a few years ago; that troupe was composed of middle-aged and elderly professionals who knew some of the business. How the children and the young folk loved it! Why has the entertainment gone out of fashion? Is it because the good-looking young fellows who sing so melodiously hate to hide their faces from the girls in the audience?

In the days of our youth no seaside resort was complete without the niggers on the sands, and you stood to watch them and put pence in the tambourine of the collector while the show was in progress. What was wrong with it? It seemed good fun, and the singing was as good as it is to-day. The jests of Bones and Sambo through the medium of Mars Johnson were surely as amusing as the low comedians' wheezes of to-day, and a lot cleaner than some of them.

The nigger minstrel was not, as many

people used to think, the parodied survival of Abolitionary days, when (alleged) escaped slaves were carried about the country, feasted and fêted by charitable though weak-minded folk with more money than sense. One of the best instances of this sort of cheat is found in George Borrow's "Wild Wales," where he describes the meeting with a negro who posed as a cruelly ill-used slave escaped from his brutal American master to the "land of the brave and the free," and who was far too lazy to earn his living when he was being kept in fat idleness by foolish sympathizers.

The Nigger Minstrel is undoubtedly of far greater antiquity than negro slavery in either England or America, although it cannot be denied that the form of entertainment popularized on both sides of the Atlantic was based to a very great extent on the musical festivals of the slave-worked cotton plantations way down South. It was another instance of the innovations swamping and smothering the original.

As long ago as 1588, a book published at Langres, entitled "Orchesography," a treatise on orchestration, by Thoinot Arbeau, a monk, gave very definite directions for performing the "Danse des Morisques," the dance of the Moors, which is now preserved in our Morris (Moorish) Dances. The number of dancers varies from nine to one only; usually gaily dressed and adorned with ribbons and bells, and with the face blackened to resemble the Moor whose dance is being performed.

More than a century before that is another reference to the nigger minstrel. It is to be found in Favine's "Historie of Honour," in which he describes a magnificent banquet given in 1458, at which:—

THE NIGGER MINSTREL

"Four yonge laddes and a damosell, attired like salvages, daunced an excellent Morisco before the assemblage."

Of course, the Morisco was not performed in England very long before the local ideas and traditions of miming were drawn in and the dance lost its original characteristics; but though Robin Hood and his band of merry men, or St. George and the Dragon became leading characters in the "popping," the blackman held his place; sometimes, it must be confessed as the representative of his Satanic Majesty, and always as an object of ridicule.

Slowly the Morris dance died out; it is difficult to see exactly why. Perhaps the struggle to live in advancing civilization had something to do with it. Fortunately it has been revived of late years and made almost a cult; but the blackened faces of the Moors have not returned. That was a messy job at best. Shakespeare lifted the Moor of the old dances to a higher plane in "Othello," "Titus Andronicus" and the "Merchant of Venice."

But now we have lost all semblance of our Moors or negro slaves. But there is offered a suggestion, namely: if any amusement caterer wishes to strike out on a new line wherein he is practically certain to make money, let him start a good old-fashioned company of niggers, with men who know the business for corner men and interlocutor, good voices in the chorus, and some of the tender ballads that they used to make us sob to. That man will make a little fortune.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE DRAMA

DEAR SIR,—I am collecting for publication some notes on drama in Gloucestershire, covering the whole subject from earliest times—Plays, Players, Playwrights, Pageants and Amateurs, and shall be grateful if your readers can kindly help me, particularly with anything of an out-of-the-way kind. All the compilation must be honorary: any profit will go to charity. My object is a work which may be of interest to many and a useful permanent record.

Yours faithfully,

T. HANNAM-CLARK

12 Queen Street, Gloucester

Mr. Ben Greet's New School for Shakespeare

DURING 1927, Mr. Ben Greet has given two hundred performances of Shakespeare's plays: "The Taming of the Shrew," "Twelfth Night," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Comedy of Errors," "As You Like It," "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Tempest." This year he will add amongst other plays "Love's Labours Lost," also "The School for Scandal," "The Rivals" and "She Stoops to Conquer," several new productions, and the morality "Everyman." Also modern plays.

Mr. Greet tells us that he is inaugurating "A School of Shakespeare" and has arranged to do this, for the present, at the little "Blackfriars Theatre" (Lever House, in William Street, E.C.). The Theatre is beautifully quiet and most suited for study, rehearsals, readings and conferences, and most accessible and convenient. Mr. Greet is taking this step and giving up a good deal of his usual touring time, because he feels that young men and women wishing to become actors, professional and amateur, can get a good deal of help in diction, deportment, stage business (traditional and otherwise) and the general "technique" of the theatre, through the plays of Shakespeare firstly, and of the classics and some standard modern works. Plays will be rehearsed and acted.

Mr. Greet will not undertake to procure engagements either in other companies or his own, but with, at least, a year's careful work, he can accept students. Applications should be addressed to Mr. Greet, personally, at 160 Lambeth Road, S.E.1.

The Norwich Players will revive "Coriolanus" from February 6—11, at the Maddermarket Theatre.

In view of the controversy raging at the present time upon the staging of Shakespeare, this production, on an open stage, suggesting the Elizabethan manner, while using the modern methods of lighting and decoration, should be of more than local interest.

Norwich is perhaps the only place in England where a definite attempt is made to develop the Elizabethan playhouse.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

President:
LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN.

Chairman of the Council:
H. GRANVILLE-BARKER.
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Telephone: GERRARD 8011.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

MEMBERS may be expecting some announcement in connexion with the resolution passed at the Manchester Conference endorsing the report of the Authors Fee Committee. The report was also adopted by the League's Council at its last meeting, and instructions were given that the report should be implemented. The first step was naturally to approach the Incorporated Society of Authors. Correspondence has passed between the two bodies, and at the moment of going to press we can say that the Drama League Scheme is being considered by the Society of Authors in a friendly spirit. Pending their ultimate decision in the matter, it has been deemed wise to suspend circularization of dramatic authors direct from the Drama League. But we hope that before long an approach may be made to playwrights with a greater chance of winning their commendation of the scheme than otherwise would have been possible.

The National Festival of Community Drama will this year come to its conclusion

on the afternoon of Monday, February 6, at the New Theatre. Our readers do not need to be reminded that this *matinée* offers a unique opportunity for viewing the best amateur work which is being done in this country at the present time. In the circumstance it would be folly to claim that the performances at the New Theatre will necessarily include the best six plays performed by the six best companies of all those entered for the Festival; such a claim is rendered impossible by difficulties of adjudication, nor indeed is it necessarily the purpose of the Festival to provide so conclusive a *finale*. On the whole, however, there is no doubt that the performances at the *matinée* will be thoroughly typical of the highest standard of achievement which has been attained by several of the foremost societies taking part in the Festival.

As already announced, to win the Howard de Walden Cup will not this year carry with it the right to represent the British Drama League at the American Little Theatre tournament. Our members are aware of the financial reasons which led to the resolution at the Manchester Conference, that the League should no longer act officially on the invitation of the American Committee in this respect. This decision has been communicated to Mr. Hartwig, the director of the American Little Theatre Tournament, and if any team decides to enter for the American Tournament, it must be on its own initiative.

Our readers will be glad to find in this number of *DRAMA* a reproduction of Mr. Hoppe's fine photograph of Thomas Hardy. Hardy's relation with the theatre is dealt with in a special article, and it only remains for us here to remind our readers of the sentimental link between his life and the Drama League in that for several years, while as a young man studying architecture in London, Hardy worked in the room which is now the British Drama League Library and which then formed part of the office of Sir Reginald Blomfield.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"Twelve One-Acters." By John Pollock. The Cayme Press. 7s. 6d.

"Shelley in the Shop and Other Plays." By Victor H. Vincent. Ascerberg, Hopwood and Crew. 2s. 6d.

"The Invisible Duke." By F. Sladen-Smith. Gowans and Gray. 1s.

"Three Plays." By Edna St. Vincent Millay. Cape. 5s.

"The Judgment of François Villon." By Herbert Edward Palmer. Hogarth Press. 25s.

"Three Short Plays." By Geoffrey Dearmer. Heinemann. 2s.

"Gilbert, Sullivan, and D'Oyly Carte." By François Cellier and Cunningham Bridgeman. Pitman. 21s.

"Behind the Scenes with Cyril Maude." By Himself. Murray. 16s.

A FEW days ago, after I had been watching an amateur performance of three very light and airy one-act plays, the producer asked me for my opinion on the show. "Well," I began, laboriously endeavouring to be tactful, "I quite realize how difficult these plays are for amateurs, and on the whole—" But the producer was too astonished to allow me to continue. "Why!" he exclaimed, "we deliberately chose these plays because they seemed so slight and easy. After all, you must admit that there is nothing in them that requires any real acting." This idea that the lighter the play, the easier it is to act, seems very common among amateurs. As a general rule, the lighter the play, the more it relies upon stylish and finished acting and producing. There is so little to be done that unless it is done perfectly there is nothing left. On the other hand, plays with strong, rather melodramatic characters and situations are much easier than most amateurs imagine. There is so much to act that there is still something left even if half the effects are missed. Besides, it requires much less technique to act strong, simple emotions than to play the cynic toying with a cigarette and an epigram.

It is for these reasons that I recommend Mr. Pollock's plays for the consideration of amateur companies. I suppose that in one sense they are a little old-fashioned. They belong to the days when the one-acter was solidly built for the professional stage. Subtlety is not their strong point, but they make up for that with the rich effectiveness of their plots, while character, incident and dialogue are handled with so bold and unerring a sense of the theatre that these vividly-coloured plays make a refreshing contrast to the neat, efficient little dramatizations of trivial incidents which are being acted in increasing numbers by amateur companies. I suggest that for a change these companies stretch their limbs in the more spacious atmosphere of Mr. Pollock's plays, with their vigorously drawn characters and strong emotions. A course of these plays and others of their kind would do much to counteract the rather cramped and giggling style which—judging from what I have seen of the Community Drama Festival

—makes much of the best amateur acting so unsatisfying.

Mr. Vincent's book is another collection of plays in the professional tradition. They are efficient and amusing, and will be useful to amateur companies who do not take themselves particularly seriously. The discreet way in which the author has used all the well-worn but still effective tricks of the trade to gain his effects makes these plays very safe for comparatively inexperienced amateurs. If you want the completest of complete contrasts, there is Mr. Sladen-Smith's "The Invisible Duke," riotously unusual and sublimely ridiculous. I do not know how on earth one describes a play like this. The author calls it "a Gothic farce." Let us leave it at that. You will either think it utterly futile or—like myself—be completely captivated by it. But at least read it and form your own opinion, for we are so starved of one-act plays of the sort which make their effect through the eye as well as the ear that one cannot afford to disregard a play such as this which, besides giving opportunities for fantastically original costumes and settings, calls for methods of production inspired by the ballet and the mime. In case you are prevented from reading the play by the stupid picture on the cover, I hasten to assure you that it has nothing whatsoever to do with the play.

Two other plays making use of the stage to appeal to the eye as well as the ear are the distinctly original and most attractively flavoured one-act satires in Miss Millay's book. The third play in her book, a full length one, hardly succeeds as a work for the stage, in spite of much fine verse of the supple and instantly effective kind ideally suited to the theatre. The publishers describe it as being in the Shakespearean tradition, but the situations and characters are apt to be more reminiscent of the traditions of Wardour Street than of Shakespeare. Nor is the other historical play of the month—"The Judgment of François Villon"—likely to be any more successful in the theatre. It is interesting both as a study of Villon's character and as a story, but the language in which it is written is singularly unsuited to the stage, although the very qualities which make it almost impossible from the actor's point of view make it peculiarly attractive prose to read.

To the three really original plays which this month's batch has so far yielded must be added Mr. Dearmer's book. A little capacity for self-criticism would have made these plays so very much better. Thoroughly witty lines are followed by less subtle forms of humour. The whole of the second play, a dialogue between Adam and Eve, relies on somewhat obvious methods of gaining an effect. But the other two plays in the book, in spite of all their faults, have peculiarly individual qualities of their own, and each in a completely different way is so strongly original that they are unusually interesting, both for what they are and what they promise.

The last two books on the list I recommend as two of the pleasantest and most interesting books of theatrical reminiscences which have appeared for some time.

A NOTE ON VILLAGE PLAY PRODUCTION

By H. R. Barbor

THE widespread development of the village community theatre movement is a happy portent of that nation-wide dramatic revival which seems to be now well under way. From my own experience as an interested observer of various developments of this kind, and in particular as producer of three bills submitted by the Shoreham Village Players, I find that there is no activity more directly advantageous to the mental, and in many ways even to the physical, well-being of English village communities than the production of good plays. There is nothing like the amicable co-operation involved in this work to produce the spirit of *cameraderie*, to smooth the rough edges of personality, to promote a sense of responsibility and to develop latent ability of various kinds.

First must be considered the choice of a play. Classic English drama, and particularly that of the Elizabethan period, probably offers the best field for a village dramatic organization, more especially in the initial stages. Large casts mean a number of small parts, and the more people there are taking part the wider will be the field of direct interest. Then again, the social life of Elizabethan England, its variety and its strongly marked character, are perhaps more nearly attuned to those of the modern village community than are the bulk of present-day plays. Again, "period" costume and decoration assist the embryo actor and help to create an illusion which even slight histrionic technique can intensify. Character, in a word, is more easy of attainment in acting than is style. The lesser known examples of Elizabethan dramatic craftsmanship offer a rich province for the exploitation of such societies. For the more advanced there are, too, the vast resources of Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy upon which to draw. And all these have one cardinal advantage, that they do not demand the payment of royalties or amateur fees.

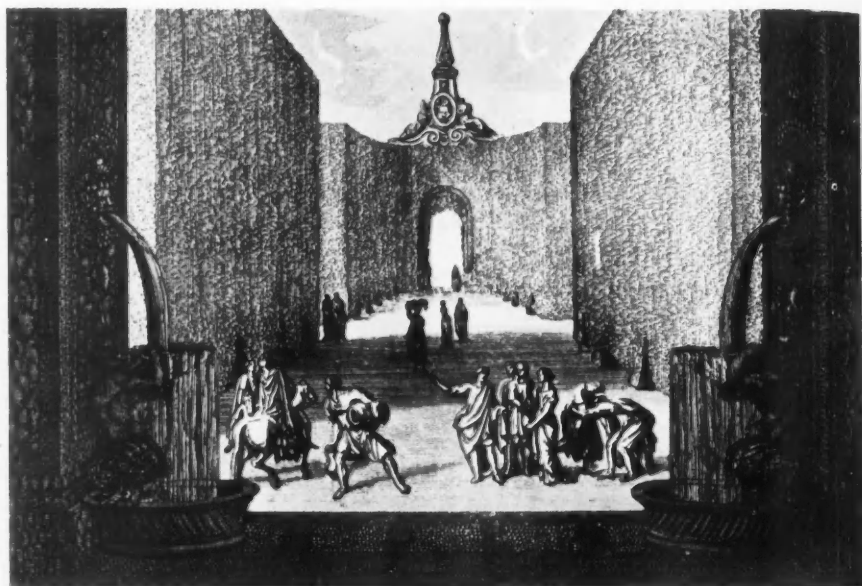
The play and producer having been selected, the latter must be the sole arbiter in the matter of casting, decoration and general organization of the production. He must, in a word, be vested with dictatorial powers and supported by the unquestioning loyalty of the whole organization. In a village community a thousand social, educational and other considerations will inevitably arise. The only way to bridge the many consequent difficulties is for a single individual to work fearlessly and favourably. In casting the chosen play, the director must be governed by two, and only two, considerations, the physical suitability and mental aptitude of the player for a given part. It is easy to be led into personal considerations of the relative friendliness, sociability and so forth of the membership. But such considerations will inevitably mar the efficiency of the production, even if they do not eventually wreck the society.

The first rehearsal should consist of a brief discussion of the play, the character and relation of the *dramatis personae*, immediately followed by a round-table reading accompanied by copious notetaking by all members. At the second rehearsal it is advisable to "walk through" the play, establishing the general positions, exits and entrances. By the third rehearsal the players should be "rough-perfect." Business should be spoon-fed. Some players will develop as they proceed and can undertake more histrionic responsibility, even inventing their own valuable effects, while others will probably be found less capable. These last should never be overdone with unessential stage business or they will mar the effects produced by more imaginative players in the team.

The utmost frankness of criticism without respect of persons must be maintained throughout by the producer. The keynote of rehearsal should be work, not play. As soon as the producer can divorce himself



A STAGE DECORATION EXHIBITED BY THE
RUSSIAN METAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION AT
THE EUROPA HOUSE EXHIBITION IN BERLIN



DESIGN FOR A GARDEN THEATRE BY JEAN
LEPAUTRE. REPRODUCED FROM "MONU-
MENTA SCENICA"

Other illustrations from this publication form
part of the Drama League Exhibit at the
International Theatre Exhibition at the
Whitechapel Art Gallery, to be opened on
February 3.

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A NOTE ON VILLAGE PLAY PRODUCTION

from the actual escorting of players about the stage, producing details of gesture and so forth, he should work at the greatest possible distance from the players which the premises permit. This makes the actors speak up, "put it over," work for the full range of the house. It is difficult to over-stress the importance of this factor in amateur production.

There is a tendency for village players to burke the important issue of providing their own scenery and costumes and to hire or borrow these. This is most regrettable, for it robs productions of individuality, and even more important, prevents that wholehearted co-operation throughout the community which is assured if those who do not act realize that all can have a share in providing for the enjoyment of the community. Designing and manufacturing the scenery and costumes gives an outlet to creative talents often dormant, talents which are equally important in their contribution to the performance as are histrionic or musical executive ability.

Exchanges from village to village are most desirable. But the best exchanges are those of complete productions, not when, for example, costumes for "As You Like It" are used in an adjoining village for the presentation of "Henry VIII." It is essential that village community drama should not be looked upon as merely amateur acting, that is that the stagecraft, business management and administration should be given an equal place in the sun.

Above all, originality in the choice of plays, impersonation and mounting should be the main object. Creation rather than imitation should be the *mot d'ordre*. Throughout the history of drama all the great revitalizations have come from the people for the people. The amount of æsthetic, intellectual and administrative energy and craftsmanship, latent even in the small villages, which can be arrayed to the service of community drama and to the advantage of the theatre as a whole is a matter for astonishment—even to the optimist.

AMBITIOUS AMATEURS

By Anthony Clyde

NEVER, one imagines, were there amateur actors more ambitious than those who performed nothing less than "Othello" in no other place than Drury Lane a hundred and seventy years ago. The leading spirit was Sir Francis Delavel, a gay young gallant keenly interested in the stage and a close friend of Foote, the actor.

Foote suggested to Sir Francis "that as he was fond of the stage and a good performer, it would be turning his talents to some account to get up a creditable play with himself and his friends in the chief characters." Sir Francis greeted the idea with enthusiasm. He was genuinely interested in the drama and a player of real ability, but above all the suggestion appealed to him as a social prank, a whimsical extravagance of the first order.

Garrick consented to let Drury Lane for two nights, the first for a rehearsal and the

second for the performance, for £150. Delavel and his friends chose "Othello" as their play, and trained zealously for the night. In due course an advertisement appeared announcing that the play of "Alfred" by Thomson and Mallet was postponed, "the theatre being engaged to some gentlemen and ladies for a private play." It was closed on March 6, 1757, for the full-dress rehearsal. A splendid band of music was engaged. New and beautiful scenery had been specially painted. "The dresses were not only magnificent but well fancied and adapted to the characters. Othello's was a robe in the fashion of his country, Roderigo's an elegant modern suit, and Cassio's and Iago's very rich uniforms."

On March 7 the great performance took place. "The rage was so great to see it," wrote Horace Walpole, "that the House of Commons literally adjourned at three o'clock on purpose; the footmen's gallery

AMBITIOUS AMATEURS

was strung with blue ribands. What a wise people! What an august senate!" The streets and avenues about Drury Lane were so blockaded with coaches and chairs that many fine ladies and gentlemen had to tramp through the mire to the theatre, "affording much diversion to the mob assembled and great benefit to the pick-pockets." The crowd was so great that the public-houses in the neighbourhood, it was said, swarmed with "stars and garters," waiting for a slackening of the excitement and pressure of the people to allow them to make their way to the theatre. Admission was by ticket, of course, and eagerly had tickets been accepted by the world of fashion. The royal guests occupied the stage box—the Prince and the Princess of Wales, the Duke of Cumberland, the Princess Amelia, Prince George (afterwards George III), and Princess Augusta. The tickets specified no particular parts of the house. Those first arriving had the choice of the best places, and as the greatest personages were among the last, they were packed in the upper galleries, which were ablaze with jewels and decorations.

The performance was a great triumph. "The performers," wrote a critic, "were all perfect in their parts, and what is seldom observed by the best experienced actors, they were, through the play, constant in their attention and characteristic in their manners. Their elocution was natural and easy, free from the whine, the cant, the clap-trap trick, and the false consequence so often hackneyed upon the stage." Sir Francis Delavel as Othello made a great impression. His embracing Desdemona on their meeting in Cyprus "set many a fair breast among the audience a-palpitating." His expressions of anguish were "truly affecting," his bursts of vengeful passion "very moving," and when in the last act he addressed Cassio with the words, "I do believe it—I ask your pardon," the manner in which he took the hand of his injured lieutenant "had something in it so like the man of honour and so unlike all imitation, that the audience could not be easily reconciled afterwards to the hearing it from anybody else." John Delavel as Iago "was perfectly the character that Shakespeare

drew." He is said to have delighted and astonished his audience; his deportment was elegant, his eye worked as much as his tongue, and he was equally intent on his plots when engaged in the dialogue or when silent upon the stage. The other characters won golden opinions by their natural acting and especially did Desdemona charm all.

Sir Francis Delavel was "frivolous, indolent, wasteful, and dissolute," but he had no lack of ready wit. In the House of Commons he once scored off the elder Pitt, who described certain opinions he had expressed as savouring too much of "the buffoonery of the stage." Sir Francis retorted: "If once performing a character on the stage can be imputed to me an act of buffoonery, I must plead guilty to the charge. But this I can say in my own justification, and I wish it could equally apply to the right honourable gentleman who spoke last, that it is the only part I have ever played in my life."

He died suddenly in 1772, while indulging at the table of Lord Mexborough, his brother-in-law. After a hearty dinner, he partook freely of ice, felt chilled, called for brandy, and drinking it off, fell down in convulsions. Foote was greatly affected, but could not forego his joke. When he was informed that the surgeons intended to open Sir Francis's head, he cried, "What for? What do they expect to find there? I'm sure I've known poor Frank these five-and-twenty years, and I never could find anything in it."

STRATFORD

Miss Scott's fine designs for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Competition has had a remarkably good "Press." We hope to print a critical article on the plans when there has been time and opportunity to consider them in detail. From the illustrations that have appeared, it is clear that the new playhouse will not be, architecturally at any rate, "in the spirit of Stratford." This, however, is not the paramount consideration. For once, it seems, the technical aspects of the problem are to have due weight, Mr. Flower and some of his colleagues having left England to inspect the newer theatres and stages on the Continent.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

PLAY AND PAGEANT UNION, OF HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB, IN "SANFAIRYANN"

The New Year Entertainment, "Sanfairyann," presented by the Play and Pageant Union, at the Institute, Hampstead Garden Suburb, was an admirable all-round show, and left one impressed by the many and versatile talents that this Society has at command. Pandora, spoken by Miss Molly Bourne, produced from her box, for our three-nights' delectation, a dozen or more sketches, playlets, and turns, of which those mentioned below had most appeal. "See Me Dance the Polka," by Mr. Charles Thomas and Company, awakened pleasing recollections, and there were early (copy-book) memories also in "Parlez vous Français?" a farcical sketch, neatly written, in French, by Mrs. G. W. Bishop, produced by Marjorie Allen, and played by a quartette, in which Mrs. Hilda Mason and Mr. Gilbert Davis acted well, in their dissimilar styles, and showed surprising command over a foreign tongue. "The Lift," written and produced by Paul Jewitt, who also played therein, was a clever sketch, in satirical Macabre vein, which might well find its way into a West-end revue; but the audience, as a whole, were, perhaps, most pleased by Mr. Thomas and Company's mimed folk song, "I Rode My Little Horse," the outstanding personality of which was that horse's rider, Mary Payne, whose perfect sense of rhythm, and grace and truth of movement and gesture, were simply captivating. Quite amusing, also, to us locals, was Mr. G. W. Bishop's sketch, "The Amenities of the Suburb," a shrewd bit of topical-topographical satire. Among the music-hall "star" turns that followed, I liked best the same contributor's oration, delivered by himself, in the manner of Milton Hayes, and Mr. Donald Soper's monologue, with a blackboard, in the manner of I know not who; my abysmal ignorance of music-halls compelling me to take these impersonations upon trust, rather than from knowledge. The smoothness and slickness with which thirteen episodes were run through, with only one interval, and without a single hitch, is much to the credit of Dr. Stephen Coffin, responsible for stage management and lighting.

PERCY ALLEN

WEARMOUTH PAGEANT

The performance opened with three cleverly conceived scenes, chronicling the Venerable Bede's entry into the Wearmouth Monastery. It was, as it should be, highly ecclesiastical, but the setting and lighting were charming. The audience were introduced in the first scene in "The Northumbrians" to the cloisters of St. Peter's on a fast day; the second scene was a meeting of the monks in Chapter; and the third, the actual day of Bede's adoption in the monastery, a festival day, the contrast between penitential and festival days being brought out by two processions, in which were sung "Ex surge, Domine" and the sixteenth-century prose of Fortunatus "Salve, festa dies."

Quite different was Mr. Vincent's "Here's to Our Enterprise," which is founded on a memory

of Henry Irving and his last appearance in Sunderland in 1904. He lives over in his mind the memory of that fateful day in Dock Street on the afternoon and evening of September 29, 1856, and the scene with his landlady, Emily Blossom, is enacted all over again. As Mr. H. M. Walbrook says in his "Foreword," it is right to include in a Wearmouth Pageant a play on the master in such an historical and soul-stirring episode.

The third and final episode in the Wearmouth Pageantry takes us back to 1750, with the story of Sir Robert Shaftoe.

THE PLAYFELLOWS DRAMATIC SOCIETY

This company performed "The Unfair Sex," by Eric Hudson, at the Cripplegate Theatre, on January 16. The performance seemed to me to be a great waste of effort on a weak play. Though described as a farcical comedy, there were far too many dull moments, the humour was for the most part patchy, save for the last act, which contained the best of the play. The performers themselves lacked that brisk touch so necessary for successful farce, and had not that happy knack of delivering epigram as spontaneous wit. The latter savoured more of laboured repetition. The outstanding exception was that of Rosie Noakes, and two other good performances were given by Majorie Webb and Robert Edney. Whilst the company could not be accused of inaudibility, their tones were inclined to be too well modulated, and necessitated a certain amount of strain on the part of the audience.

OSWALD GILBERT

THE BENTON PLAYERS

On Saturday, December 10, and Monday, December 12, the Benton Players, Rawdon—a small but enterprising society—presented Charles Hannan's play "A Cigarette Maker's Romance."

There was a crowded hall at both performances. All the artists acquitted themselves well, and the pathos and humour of the play were fully appreciated by the audience.

The plays performed since the Society's inauguration are as follows:—

- "Mr. Pim passes by."
- "She Stoops to Conquer."
- "The Passing of the Third Floor Back."
- "The Importance of Being Earnest."
- "The Playgoers."
- "The Boy Comes Home."
- "Between the Soup and the Savoury."
- "Quality Street."
- "I'll Leave it to You."
- "Nothing but the Truth."

THE IMPERIAL COLLEGE MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC SOCIETY

In many ways "The Skin Game" is the most interesting of John Galsworthy's plays, because it shows him at his best and also at his worst. The present production held the interest of the audience as long as Mr. Galsworthy himself was interesting, and

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

made up for what it lacked in polish by a cheery enthusiasm and a determination not to let down the play. Two performances stood out. The laurels went to Mr. W. C. J. Ottaway for his Dawker. This actor has confidence, personality, and a nice sense of characterization. Mr. C. A. M. Prior put up a jolly good show in the difficult part of Hornblower. He had not sufficient attack, but his pace was admirable. The production (Mr. Prior again distinguished himself) was good. Incidentally the Society must learn not to talk and make distracting movements when the interest is focussed in another quarter; and why, oh why, was everyone so over made-up? I should like to close with a word of particular praise for the scenic artist. His "Blue Dragon" hotel was superb.

ROBERT NEWTON

SCOTTISH NATIONAL THEATRE SOCIETY

The Society's Christmas entertainment was the first performance of a work by John Brandane, defined as a comedy in four acts and entitled "Heather Gentry." It is good entertainment and amused a full house, but can hardly, even by the most indulgent critic, be called a play. It was more like an agreeable dream in which two of Mr. Brandane's former plays "The Glen in Mine" and "Full Fathom Five" were mingled with recollections of "Peg o' my Heart." The characters wandered on and off the stage without any particular reason and made remarks about nothing in particular. The plot was disclosed in a short speech in the third act and we learn that the play concerns the daughter of an Irish profiteer who has taken service as tablemaid with a Highland laird in order to learn the manners and customs of the "Gentry" and was quite disillusioned thereby. I suppose we must take her word for it and accept the fact that there was a plot.

The acting, as usual, was of a high standard. As the Irish servant girl Miss Nell Ballantyne delighted us with a very finished piece of comedy acting. Miss Elsie Brochie in a thankless part looked charming and extracted all that was to be got out of a very insipid character. Mr. Wharrie as the laird acted with real force. The whole piece was appreciably "lifted" every time he came on to the stage.

Mr. T. P. Maley made a really delightful character study of an Irish profiteer. The remainder of the cast were all adequate.

One hears with considerable relief that the next production by the Players will be "The Mannoeh Family" which was performed with considerable success at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, and should be a play really worth seeing.

W. S.

HIGH WYCOMBE

The Operatic and Dramatic Society produced "You Never Can Tell" in the Town Hall on three nights in November. Following the precedent created in July last when Mr. Weston Wells came down to criticize "Twelfth Night," the Drama League were asked to arrange for a critic to attend one of the performances. Mr. Lawrence Tiffin, of the Hampstead Play and Pageant Union, came and submitted a very valuable

and intensive criticism on the production, staging, lighting, etc., and on each player, which is very much appreciated by all concerned. Of the players the Waiter was accorded the highest commendation of praise by Mr. Tiffin, but the whole cast worked well together and it was a well-balanced production that the Society feels it has made another step in the right direction. Our critic had a strong predilection that the piece should be played in 1896 costume, instead of in modern dress; as a matter of fact it had been intended to do this, but the difficulty of obtaining suitable costumes was such that the Society decided not to proceed with the idea.

THE CHRISTMAS PLAY AT CATFORD

At the fifth annual Christmas mystery play presented by the players of St. Andrew's parish, Catford, S.E., in December, the interesting experiment was made of relaying the choir and organ from the church by wireless to the stage in the adjoining hall, two microphones being suspended in the flies, and concealed from the audience by the sky-borders of the scene. The transmission both of the solo and choral numbers, and of the organ itself, was excellent, and the general effect satisfied the highest expectations. The installation was entrusted to the Amplion Company. The play given was the evergreen "Eager Heart." The players may be heartily commended not only for the merit of individual performances, and for their team-work, but also for the genuine Oberammergau spirit which prevails among them. This is the more remarkable for the fact that the whole cast is duplicated, and that for some of the parts there are even three performers, playing in turns throughout the week. It is a pity that the situation of the locality away from the beaten track (although the hall is barely half an hour's journey from Charing Cross by frequent mainline trains) seems to prevent these really notable productions from being more widely known, for they are in many respects exemplary of their kind. The parish is fortunate in having a spacious hall, with ample accommodation behind the scenes; the proportions and appointments of the two-level stage are perfectly adapted to the purpose, and the lighting effects, including a vision of angels gradually appearing and disappearing, could scarcely be improved upon. The dramatic work showed a considerable advance upon that of the previous years, and the text of the book, which is entirely in verse, was admirably rendered. As in former years, the undertaking was initiated by the Rev. D. M. Salmon, and the producer was Mr. Gilbert Hudson, who also assisted the author of the play, Miss A. M. Buckton, in her production of it at the Church House, Westminster.

ST. PANCRAS PEOPLE'S THEATRE

The Playgoers Club, led by Mr. Horace Shipps, meets on the third Sunday in every month in the Theatre (Tavistock Place, London, W.C.1) to discuss Plays and Dramatic Art questions. The next meeting will be on Sunday, February 12, at 8.30, when "Candida," by Bernard Shaw, presented at the Theatre on February 9, will be discussed. All interested are invited.

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